

Remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast February 6, 1997

Thank you very much, Congressman Barrett. I want to thank you for making it possible for me to follow Dr. Carson. *[Laughter]* And that business about worrying about whether the Secret Service would take you away if you talked too long, if that were true I wouldn't be here today. I'd be long gone. *[Laughter]* That biochemical description of—I got a real problem; I can't remember my home phone number anymore. *[Laughter]*

Senator Akaka, Mr. Speaker, Congressman Gephardt, to all the Members of Congress and the Governors who are here and our leaders and visitors from other lands and ministers and citizens from the United States. I've had a wonderful day today. I would like not to pour cold water on the day, but just as you go through the day I would like to ask all of you to remember the heartbreaking loss that our friends in Israel have sustained in the last couple of days with 73 of their finest young soldiers dying in that horrible accident in the air.

I would like to also say that, like all of you, I was very elevated by this experience, as I always am. I thought Dr. Carson was wonderful. I thought the Scriptures were well chosen. I appreciate Doug Coe and all the people who work on the prayer breakfast so much.

I would like to just say a couple of things very briefly. In my Inaugural Address and again in my State of the Union, I quoted Isaiah 58:12, which Reverend Robert Schuller sent to me a few days before I started my second term, to remind us that we should all be repairers of the breach. And it's a very moving thing. And basically the political press here read it in the proper way; they said Clinton wants the Republicans and Democrats to make nice to each other and do constructive things.

But then I got to thinking about who is it that's in the breach. Who has fallen between the cracks? If we repaired the breach, who would we be lifting out of the hole? And very briefly, I'd like to just mention three things and to ask you not only to pray for these three groups of people but also to do something about it. I don't know about you, but whenever I hear somebody like Dr. Carson speak, I can clap better than anybody in the audience. Then the

next day, when I get up and try to live by what he said I was supposed to do, it turned out to be harder than it was to clap. So I would like to ask you to think about who is in the breach, if we're supposed to be repairers of the breach.

The first group of people that are in the breach are the poor in America, and they're different then they used to be. When I was a boy, most poor people were old. In 1995, we learned last year, we had the lowest rate of poverty among older Americans in the history of the country. We have succeeded in taking them out of poverty, virtually all of them. We should be proud of that and grateful. Today, almost all the poor are young, very young people without much education, a lot of mothers like Dr. Carson's mother, struggling, doing the best they can to raise their kids.

We just passed this welfare reform bill which I signed and voted for because I believed it. And we did it because we believed that the welfare system had gone from being a system that helped the poor to help themselves to move off welfare, to a system that trapped people because the family unit has changed and there are so many single parents out there having children, and there isn't the stigma on it there used to be. And a lot of people now seem to be stuck on that system from generation to generation. So we changed it—we didn't change it; we tore it down. We threw it away. We said, "There's no longer a national guarantee that you can always get a check from the Government just because you're poor and you've got little babies in your home. Now the kids can have health care and we'll give them food, but you don't get an income check every month. And you've got to go to work if you're able to."

So the people that are in the breach are the people that we say have to go to work, who want to go to work, who can't go to work. And you have to help us repair the breach. Two and a quarter million people moved off the welfare rolls in the last 4 years. A million of them, more or less, were adults who went to work; the others were their children—a million out of 11 million new jobs created.

In the next 4 years, there's about, more or less, 10 million more people left on welfare, about 3½ million adults, maybe 4, most of them able-bodied. And all of them are supposed to lose their benefits if they're able-bodied after 2 years unless they go to work. Where are they going to get the jobs? You're going to have to give them—private employers, churches, community nonprofits. I see the Governor of Michigan, the Governor of North Dakota here. They can actually take the welfare check and give it to you now as an employment or a training subsidy or to help you deal with transportation or child care or whatever.

But you better hire them. And if you don't, this whole thing will be a fraud, and we will not have repaired the breach. And all that we dreamed of doing, which is to create more Dr. Carsons out of those children of welfare recipients, will go down the drain because we come to places like this and clap for people like him and then we get up tomorrow morning and we don't repair the breach and do what we're supposed to do. And I need you to help.

The second people who have fallen between the cracks are people around the world who are in trouble that we could help without troubling ourselves very much. I'm proud of what our country has done in Bosnia and the Balkans—you should be too—in the Middle East, in Haiti, to help our neighbors in Mexico. Impulses—the American people are generous. I want to thank the Speaker for supporting me when only 15 percent of the American people thought we were right when we tried to help our friends in Mexico. Thank goodness they proved us right, Mr. Speaker, otherwise we might be out in the south 40 somewhere today.

But still our country has this idea that somehow it demeans us to pay our dues to the United Nations or to participate in the World Bank or—there's lots of things more important than that—or just to give Secretary Albright, who's here, the basic tools of diplomacy. This is an interdependent world. We can get a long way with having the finest defense in the world, but we also have to help people become what they can be.

So I ask you to think about that. We're not talking about spending a lot of money here. It's only one percent of our budget. But we can't walk away from our obligations to the rest of the world. We can be a model for the rest of the world, but we also know that we have

to model the behavior we advocate, which is to give a helping hand when we can.

The third people who are in the breach and are in a deep hole and need to be lifted up are the politicians. And we need your help. We need your help. And some members of the press, they're in that breach with us, too, and they need your help. *[Laughter]*

This is funny, but I'm serious now. And tomorrow, I want you to wake—I want you to laugh today and wake up and be serious tomorrow. This town is gripped with people who are self-righteous, sanctimonious, and hypocritical; all of us are that way sometimes. I plead guilty, from time to time. We also tend to get—we spend an enormous amount of time here in Washington trying to get even. And it doesn't matter who started it.

I remember when I came here one time, I got so mad at our friends in the Congress and the Republican Party because they were real mean to me over something. I went back to the White House, and I asked somebody who had been there a while in Washington, and I said, "Now, why in the world did they do that?" They said, "It's payback time." I said, "What do you mean?" They said, "Well, they think the Democrats in Congress did this to Republican Presidents." I said, "I didn't even live here then. Why are they paying me back?" They said, "Oh, you don't understand. You've just got to pay back."

So then, pretty soon I was behaving that way. I'd wake up in the morning, and my heart was getting a little harder. "Now, who can I get even with?" You think—this happens to you, doesn't it? "Who can I get even with?" And sometimes you can't get even with the person that really did it to you, so you just go find somebody else, because you've got to get even with somebody. Pretty soon, everybody's involved in this great act.

You know how cynical the press is about the politicians, you know. They think we're all whatever they think. What you should know is that the politicians have now become just as cynical about the press, because cynicism breeds cynicism.

We're in a world of hurt. We need help. We are in the breach. We are in the hole here. This country has the most astonishing opportunity we have ever had. We happen to be faced with this time of great change and challenge. We're going into this enormous new world. And

instead of going into it hobbled with economic distress or foreign pressures, we are free of any threat to our existence and our economy is booming. And it's like somebody said, "Here's this brave new world, and I'm going to let you prepare for it and walk into it in the best shape you've ever been in." And instead of doing that, half of us want to sit down, and the other half of us want to get in a fight with each other. We are in the breach. And we need you to help us get out of it.

The United States is better than that. We owe more than that to our people, to our future, and to the world. We owe more than that to our heritage, to everybody from George Washington on, that made us what we are today. And cynicism and all this negative stuff is just sort of a cheap excuse for not doing your best with your life. And it's not a very pleasant way to live, frankly—not even any fun.

I try to tell everybody around the White House all the time, I have concluded a few things in my life, and one of them is that you don't ever get even. The harder you try, the more frustrated you're going to be, because nobody ever gets even. And when you do, you're not really happy. You don't feel fulfilled.

So I ask you to pray for us. I went to church last Sunday where Hillary and I always go, at the Foundry Methodist Church, and the pastor gave a sermon on Romans 12:16 through 21 and a few other verses. But I'm going to quote

the relevant chapters. "Do not be wise in your own estimation." It's hard to find anybody here that can fit that. "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, be at peace with all men." "Never take your own vengeance." "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink." "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Pray for the people in public office that we can rid ourselves of this toxic atmosphere of cynicism and embrace with joy and gratitude this phenomenal opportunity and responsibility before us. Do not forget people in the rest of the world who depend upon the United States for more than exhortation. And most of all, remember that in every Scripture of every faith, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of admonitions not to forget those among us who are poor. They are no longer entitled to a handout, but they surely deserve, and we are ordered to give them, a hand up.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:28 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Representative Bill Barrett, chairman, 1997 National Prayer Breakfast; Dr. Ben Carson, director of pediatric neurosurgery, Johns Hopkins Hospital; Doug Coe, who helped organize the event; and Governors John Engler of Michigan and Edward T. Schafer of North Dakota.

Remarks on the 1998 Budget *February 6, 1997*

Good morning. In my State of the Union Address, I issued a call to action to prepare our people for the 21st century. I said that to do that we first had to finish the unfinished business of America, beginning with balancing the budget.

Today I am submitting to Congress my plan to balance the budget by 2002. It will spur economic growth, promote education and our other priorities, and eliminate the Federal deficit for the very first time in three decades. I am proud of this budget, and I want to thank the people here on the economic team who worked with me on it. Thank you.

For too many years, it seemed as if our deficit would grow forever, that there was nothing we could do about it. As a result, our economy and our people suffered. Four years ago I took office with a plan to reduce the deficit in half in 4 years, as we invested in our people. In fact, the deficit has been cut by nearly two-thirds, from \$290 billion in 1992 to \$107 billion in 1996. That makes it, as a proportion of our economy, the smallest of any major nation in the world.

Our economy, therefore, has gotten stronger. It's the strongest it's been in a generation. The American people have produced over 11 million